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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JULY 1st, 1863.

ESSAY ON MUSIC.

From the 'Penny Cyclopædia.'

(Continued from page 64.)

OF the music of the Hebrews, nearly all that is known is to be collected from the Scriptures, and the Bible is in the possession of every one. There we meet with the first recorded song, which Moses sang at the head of the tribes, after the miraculous passage of the Red Sea. To this responded Miriam the prophetess, having a timbrel or tambourine in her hand, and being attended by all the women, carrying the same instruments, and dancing. Music formed an essential part of every Jewish ceremony. The priesthood were musicians by office, which was hereditary: they were four thousand in number, divided into bodies, each of which had its chief or leader. At the dedication of Solomon's temple, a prodigious band of priests, blowing trumpets, attended. Josephus tells us that 200,000 musicians were engaged; but as his statement is unsupported by scriptural history, we may venture to consider it as a mistake arising from some misapprehension, or else as a manuscript error. A Hebrew writer enumerates thirty-six musical instruments that were kept in the sanctuary, on all of which, he says, the prophet-king David could play. These are reduced to thirty-three by another account. It is worthy of remark that many of them, under other names, are still met with in the East and in Egypt, and, as far as can be ascertained, very little changed from their original form. Martini has given, from a manuscript of 1599, what he believes to be specimens of the melodies sung by the Jews to certain Psalms; but they are printed in the obsolete notation, without bars, and having no words added to them by which the measure might perhaps have been made out, it is impossible to enter thoroughly into their meaning.

The Music of the Greeks has engaged the notice of so many searching antiquaries and patient mathematicians—such profound learning and unwearied labour have been bestowed on it—it has provoked so much controversy, and the dispute has proved so barren, that we enter on the subject reluctantly, if not fearfully; and though bound to give it as much attention as a matter of some importance is entitled to, yet we do not deem it expedient or feel inclined to afford it more than is rigorously its due. Dr. Burney, who had devoted months, if not years, to the inquiry, declared to a friend, a few months before his decease, that 'he never understood the Greek music, or found any one that did understand it.'

But before proceeding further, we think it right to say, with all possible respect for those who have toiled in this unproductive field, that, after a diligent investigation of the subject, on which we entered with an unprejudiced mind, it is our decided opinion that what is now called Greek music has hitherto proved perplexing chiefly, if not solely, on account of the term having been misunderstood. We believe that by *môusike* (μουσική) the Greeks meant *poetry sung*, with some sort of accompaniment, and that the moderns have fallen into error by overrating the importance of the melodic part, treating this as the principal, and poetry only as an ally.

Music was a comprehensive term with the Greeks, embracing among other things which we shall have occasion to mention, melody (*Melopoia*—literally the *making*, or composition, of the *song*) and poetry. There is no one, M. Villoteau remarks, who, after an attentive perusal of the ancient writers, is not convinced that eloquence, poetry, and melody were, in early times, governed by musical principles; that they were taught by the same master, and that the three arts were but one science. 'The goddess Persuasion,' says Lord Shaftesbury, 'must have been in a manner the mother of poetry, rhetoric, music, and the other kindred arts;' and tradition, he adds, 'could not better represent the first founders of large societies than as real songsters. . . . Nor can it be doubted that the same artists who so industriously applied themselves to study the numbers of speech, must have made proportionable improvements in the study of mere sounds and natural harmony.' The Greeks never separated poetry from melody; the poet himself set the notes to his own verses, and in the early times sang them at the public games and festivals. The Greek tragedies were *operas*, observes Payne Knight, meaning, we presume, that they were in a kind of recitative; and he is borne out in his assertion by the best authorities. Aristotle, in his treatise on poetry, considers the *music* of tragedy as one of its most essential parts. The nature of this *music* is indicated by several writers, but is more clearly pointed out by Philodemus than by any other, in his work in abuse of music (one of the *papyri* found in Herculaneum, unrolled and published at Naples in 1793), wherein it is described as a melody nearly approaching ordinary speech; that is to say, recitative. Horace calls Apollo *the singer*. The ancient poets give us to understand that their verses were *sung*, and this is to be construed literally in the case of the Greek poets. Homer, according to tradition, sang his own epics. But it is needless to multiply proofs of a fact so generally received.

Admitting, then, that Greek poetry of all kinds, religious, epic, dramatic, &c., was really sung, and perhaps granting, what many believe, that oratory partook much of the nature of song, let

us inquire what was meant by the word *singing*. It is not to be imagined that Homer, Tyrtaeus, Pindar, &c, were singers, in our acceptation of the word; the supposition is too absurd to be entertained for a moment. But even allowing them to have been as perfect in the vocal art as the moderns are, would they have condescended to deliver their poetry in long flights of notes, in divisions, in trills, and in passages that render it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to get at the sense? If, however, they had attempted to make their 'heaven-bred poesy' subservient to song, would they have found a patient audience?—Assuredly not; for the animating appeal, the interesting narrative clothed in poetical language, the pathetic description, were what the Greeks delighted in, and certainly would not have surrendered for the sake of a tune. Moreover, it must be recollected, and is a very important consideration, that when the art of printing was unknown, and manuscript copies of poems, &c., were unattainable by the people at large, on account of the expense, the multitude had no means of becoming acquainted with the productions of their poets but by hearing them recited; and as crowds assembled for this purpose, the best mode of rendering the voice of the reciter audible to many, and these congregated in open places, was, to pitch it rather high, and confine it to a small number of fixed musical notes. Such is still the practice, and with the same intent, in all cathedrals, and is called chanting, a usage which has doubtless been transmitted from the remotest ages. Such too is the method adopted by the *improvisatori*, whose art, we are persuaded, is of the highest antiquity, and whose singing, it is our belief, much resembles that of the ancient Greeks in delivering their verses. Those extemporaneous poets always require an instrumental accompaniment of a simple kind, to keep the voice in tune, and, as they confess, to animate them. The Greek reciters also were accompanied, either by the lyre or the flute, and probably for the same purposes. The flute was the companion of elegiac poetry; the lyre of the epic and the ode.

By what is called Greek music, therefore, we understand the union of poetry and music, the former of the two exercising the greatest sway over the mind, because expressing noble sentiments—gracefully inculcating religion and morality—teaching obedience to the laws—exciting generous feelings—and inspiring patriotism and courage by the praise of those who had distinguished themselves by their public services and their valour. It is thus we account for the effects said to have been wrought by ancient music; for it is impossible that Plato should have been thinking of mere vocal melody and the sounds of mean and imperfect instruments, when he said that no change can be made in music without affecting the constitution of the state, an opinion in which Aristotle acquiesced, and Cicero after-

wards adopted:—it is not to be credited that the laws of Lycurgus, set to measured sounds by Terpander, were turned into a song, or that this Lesbian musician quelled a sedition in Sparta by singing some pretty air to the mob:—it is absurd to suppose that when Polybius tells us of a savage nation civilised by music, he means to say, by coarse pipes and guitars;—and not less ridiculous is it to imagine that men were raised to the rank of chiefs and the dignity of legislators, solely on account of their taste in singing, or their skill on the lyre and the flute.

We cannot quit the subject of the vocal music of Greece, without adding a few words concerning the Greek *Nomes* and *Scolia*. The former (from νόμος *nomos*, a law) were so called, says Plutarch, because they were not allowed to transgress certain melodic rules by which they were characterised, and were at first hymns to the Gods. The latter were songs of a less restrained kind, sung at banquets and entertainments, by great proficient; hence Hesychius derives the term from σκολιός (*skolios*, *difficult to sing*). But others think that the word should be rendered literally,—*crooked*, *following a tortuous course*—because, at table, it did not pass regularly, but only to those who were skilful singers. Plutarch, on the authority of Pindar, tells us that the *scolia* were invented by Terpander. Dr. Burney has an entertaining chapter on the subject, vol. i., 464; but the reader will find it more learnedly discussed in Potter's 'Antiquities,' ii. 403.

As to the instrumental music of the Greeks, we confess our inability to treat the subject in a satisfactory manner. The accounts given of it by the ancient writers are either so suspicious or so indefinite, that nearly all our labour in endeavouring to gain some knowledge of its nature has been expended in vain. Having Bianchini's learned work on ancient instruments before us, we are enabled to form some opinion of their capabilities, and our opinion is not in their favour. They appear to have been rude, and suited only to music of the simplest description.

(To be continued.)

THE CHARITY CHILDREN AT ST. PAUL'S.

THE anniversary meeting of the charity children—one of the most honoured and honourable institutions in this great and crowded capital—took place yesterday afternoon, under the magnificent dome of the most magnificent of our non-Gothic cathedrals. The arrangements for this enormous and, out of London, unexampled gathering were on the usual complete and satisfactory scale. Mr. Arthur S. Newman, architect to the festivals, to whose zealous exertions and ingenious talent the public have from year to year been indebted for a *coup d'œil* wholly unrivalled in varied beauty and picturesque magnificence, had prepared everything with his accustomed diligence and foresight; while the musical arrangements, under the able superintendence of Mr. Goss, organist of St. Paul's—assisted by Mr. George Cooper (of St. Sepulchre's and Christ's Church), deputy organist, and Mr. H. Buckland, vicar-choral, who shares with Mr. Cooper the very